

LAYHAM PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD AT 7.30PM ON WEDNESDAY 27 APRIL 2022

Present: Charlotte Britton - Chair (CB)
Jane Cryer - Clerk (JC)
John Curran (JDC)
Sue Keeble (SK)
David Pratt (DP)
Sheila Roberts (SR)
Michael Woods - Vice Chair (MW)

Apologies: Graham Coleman (GC)

In attendance: Georgia Hall - Suffolk CC (GH)
John Ward - Babergh DC (JW)
Parishioners

22.4.1 INTRODUCTION & APOLOGIES

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

22.4.2 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

It was proposed by JDC, seconded by CH and agreed unanimously that the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Thursday 28 April 2021 via Zoom should be accepted as an accurate record, and signed accordingly. There were no matters arising not covered by the agenda.

22.4.3 REPORTS *(full reports are held on file with the minutes)*

Suffolk County Council

GH highlighted some of the key items from the previous twelve months. The ANPR (automatic number plate recognition) pilot scheme had started in Holton St Mary; Layham was on the list to trial the scheme in the near future. Speeding motorists would receive up to three warning letters, followed by a visit from the Police if necessary. The SEND review had led to nine recommendations for improvement and funds had been set aside for implementation. It had been announced in August 2021 that Suffolk residents could invest in renewables through a group-buying scheme for solar panels and battery storage. SCC had approved additional investment of £20m in highway drainage and footpaths; the footpath investment aimed to provide a safer and more accessible network.

Babergh District Council

JW's report was noted, together with an infographics sheet which summarised some of the key items from the previous twelve months (on the website - www.layham.org). In response to a question about the specialised emergency accommodation units to be built as part of the Rough Sleepers Accommodation Programme, JW said they would be built in urban areas such as Sudbury and Stowmarket and would not be complete houses.

Budget & Finance

JC said she was in the process of finalising the accounts for 2021/22 which would then go to SALC (Suffolk Association of Local Councils) for internal audit, before being formally approved by the Parish Council at its June meeting. The internal audit would continue to be carried out remotely as the auditors were continuing to work from home. Documents would be scanned and emailed to SALC (apart from those already on the website); this made the whole process more complicated and took longer. All smaller authorities, regardless of size, had to comply with proper practices - complete and approve an Annual Governance & Accountability Return and provide for public rights to view the accounts. Councillors had agreed that the precept for 2021/22 should remain at £11,000. The Parish Council continued to receive recycling credits and this money was used for the benefit of the community. The main items of routine expenditure during the year were the grants to the Village Hall, the Playing Field and the PCC, insurance and the Clerk's salary and tax. Other items of expenditure during the year had included the SID speeding device, now operating on Upper Street, and the development of a new website which was now up and running.

Emergency Planning

There had been 22 yellow weather warnings sent out by the Met Office during the year, concerning Layham; 6 wind related, 7 thunderstorms, 1 fog, 6 for heavy rain and 2 for snow and ice. All of these were followed up with warnings from JDC to all Parish Council members to make them aware of possible problems. Two of the warnings moved from yellow to amber, with the result that all Emergency Link Volunteers (ELVs) were informed of the pending bad weather so that they could in turn warn their parishioners. One warning in February, for high winds, was due to storm Eunice; in the space of a few hours the Met warnings moved from yellow to amber to red. This was the only red warning ever received in Layham and, as well as using the emergency communications tree, community emails were sent out. There were some extended power outages and some minor damage to trees, fences and buildings damage, but no injuries. Following the red warning, feedback was sought from ELVs and a full review would be carried out during the next few months. JDC stressed that changes were made to the communications tree whenever an ELV moved away or stepped down - if anyone was interested in becoming an ELV, they should contact him. He expressed his thanks to all the ELVs, and his fellow Council members.

Green Team

SR said it was a relief to have been able to hold an organised litter pick again, now that restrictions to prevent the spread of Covid had been eased. On Saturday 12 March, 33 volunteers gave up their time to help improve the village. As well as litter picking, village signs were cleaned, grass on Brett Green edged, hedges were cut and wind debris dealt with on the playing field. At least seven bags of rubbish were collected from the Gravel Pit Road and some fly tipping was reported to the District Council. SR thanked Babergh / MidSuffolk for providing brown bins and removing the refuse collected. She also thanked all the volunteers who worked so hard, and the parishioners who collected litter and helped to improve the village throughout the year. Brett Green and the green at Blacksmith's corner had been kept tidy by parishioners living nearby, and the Playing Field Committee continued to work hard to provide a safe and attractive area for leisure activities. Other work over the year included the removal of Himalayan balsam near the playing field, the sweeping away of a blanket of conkers on Overbury Hall Road, clearing of vegetation from road signs, and the cleaning of the war memorial. A generous donation of seed packets meant more wild flowers on the village verges. Ryan Dodson deserved a special mention for the big difference he made collecting litter in Upper and Lower Layham, as part of his work towards his Duke of Edinburgh Award. Climate change continued to be a growing concern; SR urged parishioners to try and make at least one change to help reduce their carbon footprint.

Village Facilities

In readiness for Remembrance Day last year, the War Memorial was carefully brushed and cleaned. The Parish Council looked after the two village benches alongside the river Brett - one in the nature area, the other in front of the bungalows on Brett Green; these were in good order. SCC continued to do a good job of monitoring the grit content of the 4 grit bins. Shovels and hand brushes purchased by the Parish Council in 2021 were still in place. The PC had considered purchasing additional or larger dog refuse bins - however, the bins were not looking as full as they were during lockdown, and there appeared to be fewer discarded poo bags around the village. As always, dog walkers were urged to continue to clear up after their dogs and use the bins provided.

Speeding

Speeding through Layham (and in particular Upper Layham) had been a major concern for residents for many years. Last year the PC reported that it was going to install Speed Indication Devices (SIDs) in Upper Layham in an effort to educate drivers and hopefully reduce the speed of vehicles travelling through the village. The posts for mounting the SID were erected in August 2021, with one being positioned outside Windy Ridge monitoring traffic approaching from Raydon, and the other near the bus stop, monitoring traffic approaching from Hadleigh. Whilst the Parish Council felt this latter position was not ideal, it was in line with Suffolk Highways' requirements. Highways policy also required SIDs to be moved between different locations; as a result only one SID was purchased and this was being moved from one post to the other every 7 to 10 days. The SID was delivered and installed in October 2021, visually informing drivers of their speeds and recording the speed of every vehicle passing. It did not have a camera so all data recorded was 'blind' (ie no number plates identified), but it had identified some very fast vehicles passing through the village. The original intention was to pass the data onto Suffolk Highways for them to initiate police speed checks; however, the Parish Council was informed by Highways that, due to the large a number of SIDs installed in Suffolk, they were unable to analyse all the data. As noted above, ANPR cameras would shortly be coming to Layham; these devices had cameras and recorded number plates, and speeding motorists were formally contacted. JDC thanked the volunteers who helped to move the devices regularly from one end of the village to the other.

Highways & Footpaths

MW said that the PC continued to report potholes, but it seemed that reports made by members of the public had as much, if not more, effect; he therefore urged parishioners to use the 'Highways Reporting Tool' on the SCC website. The footpath network was in satisfactory condition and well used. The surfaced path between the Mill and Church Lane still required attention and the PC would continue to press for that. In addition to the installation of the SID device (see above) 30mph signs on bins, paid for from parish resources, had made a difference. Completion of the Quiet Lanes project, in partnership with Shelley village and funded by a SCC grant, was imminent. The lanes involved were Shelley Road, Layham; Layham Road, Shelley; North Hill along the Shelley and Layham boundary; Water Lane and a small part of Mill Lane. The signage had now been received and would shortly be put in place on the new posts installed by SCC.

Allotments

Ron Gunn reported that the six allotment plots situated at Gardeners Close were all occupied and very productive. All the allotment holders helped each other, sharing seeds, plants and produce. Under the terms of their contracts they were not allowed to sell produce from the site; nevertheless neighbours and friends continued to be well looked after! Ron said how much the allotment holders had appreciated having them over the past two years of the Covid pandemic, helping to keep them all fit and sane. He noted that the weather often made it frustrating and there was a need for patience. In 2021 four of the allotment holders held a friendly competition and grew sweetcorn - all was going well, but just as the crop was almost ready to pick a visitor arrived ... probably a deer or a badger. Some you win, some you lose!

Local History

Membership of the Layham Local History Group remained at nine. A year ago the group was challenged by the Layham Parochial Church Council to create an exhibition in the church to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee over part of the long weekend Bank Holiday of 2-5 June 2022. This challenge was accepted and the group had been working all year to find and organise pictures and texts about life in the village during the 70 years from 1952 - 2022; these would be brought together and put on show on 3 and 4 June. Whilst most of the content was drawn from the existing archive, two members had been recording the memories of some of the oldest villagers. The Archivist had been adding a small number of items to the archive catalogue throughout the year.

Friends of St Andrew's

Richard Cranfield had reported that, as at 31.3.21 there were 30 members, including life members and also the families of family members. Given Layham was a village of several hundred people, this was disappointingly low. There was currently approximately £5K in the bank account to help pay for things to improve the Church, as requested by the Parochial Church Council. Two possible items would be replacing the flagpole with a new one, and a gate in the churchyard wall to enable easy access to the Village Hall (for the WCs, as the Church would never be able to afford its own). However, nothing had so far been finalised. A fund raising event was planned for September 2022 - details would be published when finalised. Everyone was encouraged to join the Friends *(forms available on the PC website: www.layham.org)*.

PCC

Christine Hempstead, Churchwarden, said she was pleased that the past year had been an improvement on the previous one due to the changing Covid rules. Regular services were being held again including Morning Worship, consisting of a more informal service along with coffee, croissants etc on the third Sunday of the month. Services were held on every fourth Sunday, alternating with All Saints, Shelley. Coffee, Cake and Chat mornings had not re-started, but it was hoped that they would later in 2022. The annual Remembrance Service was held, as well as the Hunt Carol Service. The annual plant sale was held in May which was very well attended and will take place again in 2022. There was an open day at the Mill and the money raised was donated to the Church. The planned Commonwealth War Graves Commission talk had to be cancelled, but would be rescheduled at some point. The Playschool children were given Real Easter Eggs and Advent Calendars, although it was not possible to hold the usual services for Easter, Harvest and Christmas. The Community Payback team had not been able to return to maintaining the churchyards again this year, but the PCC had booked the services of Total Gardens to regularly cut the active churchyard, across the road from the church, at a cost of £ 130.00 per cut. Several issues had arisen during the year, including a damp patch in the corner of the church caused by a problem with the roof. The flagpole was in an unusable state and it was hoped to be able to replace it during the current year; however as the Church is a listed building, there is a procedure to be followed. Christine thanked John English for continuing to provide car parking facilities and John Cryer for raising the flag throughout the year, until it became unsafe. She thanked Richard Cranfield for his hard work cutting back the branches on the trees, as well as mowing the grass, and Brian Hempstead for dealing with the overgrown areas all around the churchyard. Both men worked hard to bring the Churchyard into a presentable condition, saving the Church a considerable amount

of money. She also thanked people for their help and support during the past year, including those who had cleaned, arranged flowers and carried out other jobs. Thanks were also due to Daphne who regularly provided the music for worship, to Dusty, who did an extremely good job as Treasurer, handling enabling us to pay our quota in full, and to the Rev Jo and Claire. In response to a question from a parishioner, Christine explained that the £11,000 for the Parish Share included a contribution towards the Vicar's salary.

Playing Field Management Committee

MW reported that a programme of essential activities and maintenance had continued over the past year: the 120 Club; grass cutting; mower maintenance; tree felling; hedge and willow dome management; keeping the small play equipment box in order; a number of urgent odd jobs. A very helpful clean-up session around the boundaries was achieved on the village spring clean day. Everyone had played a part, especially Simon Bewsher for organising the 120 Club and Graham Coleman for cutting the grass. The Committee continued to save its financial reserve against replacing play apparatus and / or the ride-on mower. In response to a question from a parishioner, MW said he felt using the Playing Field's own equipment, operated by volunteers, was more cost-effective than employing a contractor; however, he agreed that it would be useful to have a comparison.

Village Hall Management Committee

A new VH Management Committee had been elected at the AGM in June 2021; David Pratt and Richard Cromwell had remained on the committee to assist with the handover during the first year. Several maintenance issues had been resolved, including lead flashings on the flat roof and faulty lighting. Committee members had carried out other works and cleaning, although a cleaner had now been employed. The committee met quarterly, but kept in regular touch. Two events were planned for 2022 - a book sale on 15 May, and a gardening talk on 11 June. The committee was pleased to receive an Omicron grant from Babergh District Council; its largest outgoing was for electricity.

Events Group

The Layham Community Events Group was formed about four years ago when some like-minded friends wanted to raise funds for local charities and further unite the communities of Upper and Lower Layham. Core membership of the group was unchanged during the pandemic and meetings were held in gardens when permitted. However, no events were held due to risks of infection. Basking in the success of the Christmas Fayre in 2018, the aim in the recent year was been to organise a Layham Community Fete to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. Serious planning got underway in October 2021 and an ambitious programme was envisaged. At this time the four remaining members were aware that a lot of community support would be essential. Christine Hempstead joined and has proved a valuable member, with her many contacts and enthusiasm. A constitution was formed and officers appointed: Sheila Roberts, chairperson, Sue Dodson, treasurer, and Sue Keeble, secretary. As a very small fundraiser the group had not formed a charity; monies were kept in the Parish Council bank account. A total of forty people had been recruited to run the fete on June 5. Local businesses had also been generous, amongst them The Marquis, The Queen's Head, Hadleigh Castings, ID Plumbing and Love Refills. Other residents had also donated prizes for events and competitions or donated money anonymously, and several people were lending equipment. The Parish Council and Babergh District Council had also given generous financial support. Funds raised would be primarily for the Playgroup and the Church.

22.4.4 MATTERS RAISED BY PARISHIONERS

A parishioner commented that the PC's revenue reserves were high, and he would like to see plans for expenditure. He also suggested that the precept could be reduced; the Clerk/RFO said this suggestion was not considered to be good practice.

22.4.5 CHAIRMAN'S CLOSING REMARKS

CB thanked everyone who had volunteered their time during the year, her fellow Councillors and the Clerk.